DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 181 792 HE 012 180

AUTHOR Hill, Joan A.: And Others
TITLE Systemwide Academic Program Review: The Florida Plan.
PUB DATE 79
NOTE 11p.: Paper presented at the National Conference of the American Association for Higher Education (Washington, DC, April 18, 1979)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College Programs: Consultants: Departments: Educational Planning: Evaluation Methods: *Higher Education: Intellectual Disciplines: Private Colleges: *Program Evaluation: *State Action: State Universities: *Statewide Planning
IDENTIFIERS *Florida

ABSTRACT

The Florida Plan for systemwide academic program review is detailed in this report. Factors leading to the initiation of systemwide review, including population changes and the changing role of the predominantly black Florida A&M University, are discussed. The design and scope of the review process are explained and selection of consultants to assess the programs is described. Five actions taken by the Board of Regents as a result of the site visits by the consultants include: (1) program approval, (2) program termination or limitation, (3) coordination and cooperation among universities and private colleges within the state, (4) budgetary considerations, and/or (5) statewide planning. The following programs have been reviewed since 1976: external degree programs, education, engineering, nursing, foreign languages and linguistics, oceanography, psychology, biological sicences, social work, and computer science. The value of the systemwide review is considered and it is concluded that while there are difficulties, especially in the area of implementation, the review aids academic planning and identifies areas of strengths and weaknesses within the system. (PHR)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH EDUCATION & WELFARE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Joan A. Hill

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

ED181792

Systemwide Academic Program Review
The Florida Plan*

Joan A. Hill, Coordinator of Academic Programs, State University System of Florida; Patricia H. Lutterbie, Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs, Florida International University; and Joseph H. Stafford, Vice Chancellor for Planning and Budgeting, State University System of Florida.

The evaluation of existing academic programs in colleges and universities traditionally has been within the purview of the faculty responsible for given programs, and it continues to be understood that the faculty will consistently address the quality of the program they offer to students. The right to this assessment is so central in the professional life of a university professor, that any voluntary surrender of it has been limited to the kind of peer review that is done by regional and professional accrediting agencies. Such accreditation reviews have become accepted, for the most part, to the point that the endorsement by accreditation groups is viewed as worth the work and expense involved in the preparation for the accreditation process. It is quite another matter, however, when a regulatory or coordinating board of a state system undertakes the task of reviewing existing programs in order to make decisions about the quality, management, and location of such programs. This kind of review is often viewed by the universities' faculty members and administrators as an intrusion into their prerogative to oversee and conduct the instructional program. Such tilting of the balance of relationships between the universities and central office toward what may be perceived by faculties as over-regulation could result in negative attitudes toward the board and result in lower morale on campuses. It must be for compelling reasons, therefore, that a central board decides to involve itself in systemwide program review.

Factors Leading to the Initiation of Systemwide Review

Systemwide program review was instituted in the State University System of Florida in 1975. At that time, along with other regulatory and coordinating boards, the Florida Board of Regents found itself facing the deteriorating economic conditions of higher education: the limited resources available in post-recession years; steadily declining enrollments in programs, such as education, which were once growth areas; the push for expansion in high cost programs such as health-related professions, law, and equipment intensive technical areas; the proliferation and duplication of programs which had been planned for a continuing pattern of expansion; and the slow-down in federal support.

In Florida, however, some of these problems were intensified by circumstances peculiar to the state. A rapidly growing and shifting population brought pressures for increased or new educational services to areas of the state where public higher education was unavailable or insufficient. Thus, after a century of reliance on three public universities to serve the state[1], six new universities were opened between 1960 and 1972[2]. A special

HE 012 180

*Paper presented at the 1979 Conference on Higher Education, Sponsored by the American Association for Higher Education, Washington, D.C. April 18.
Copyright reserved.

mission had been determined for each new university, but local pressures and external events clouded the direction of some. In particular, by 1975, programmatic decisions were becoming more difficult to make at the Board level as new campuses sought support for an increasing number of graduate programs and often presented requests that would duplicate programs at the three older institutions. In order to control what could have been a rush into unwarranted programs, the Board of Regents established a five-year moratorium on new doctoral level programs in 1971. As the time approached to lift the moratorium in 1976, the Board wished to be prepared with a systematic plan for assessing the need for new programs and the newer universities' readiness to undertake advanced degrees.

Another special circumstance which called for systemwide assessment of academic programs was the need to clarify the role of Florida A & M University, a predominantly black institution, in a changing social and educational environment. Charged with the responsibility of developing an acceptable plan for both the integration of the system of higher education and the enhancement of Florida A & M University, it was felt that a systematic evaluation process was needed to help identify unnecessarily duplicated programs and to offer ways in which programmatic parity might be accomplished.

Systemwide review in Florida, then, was seen by the Board of Regents as one path by which a planning base could be developed for programmatic decisions.

The Review Process

The design of a process for systemwide review should be a direct outgrowth of the objectives and scope of the review. It is necessary, therefore, that there be a clear understanding of the purpose and objectives of a review before the design of the process is undertaken. For example, in Louisiana, the Board of Regents has reviewed doctoral programs across the system, while other state Boards, such as Wisconsin's, review selected disciplines.

The Florida Board of Regents set the review process in motion in order to look at the quality, management, support, and location of programs in the State University System. It was decided that programs would be identified by HEGIS designation and reviewed at both the undergraduate and graduate levels across the nine universities. This decision, in turn, determined the kinds of data that would be required for an assessment of programs and for comparison of the programs in the nine universities on numbers of students enrolled, degree production, admissions, faculty, curriculum, course offerings and enrollments, budget, facilities, equipment, contracts and grants, library, and placement of students.

Some of the data needed are provided by each university in the form of a report prepared for the review and other data are provided by the system office. Trend data are used to illustrate patterns in admissions, enrollment, budget, and productivity.

Consultant Selection. The Florida plan relies on the use of external consultants to assess the programs. These individuals are selected primarily from recommendations made by the faculties in the discipline to be reviewed, university administrators, professional organizations and accrediting agencies.

The list of recommended consultants is circulated to the universities for comments about the appropriateness of the individuals named; and when possible, any consultant is removed from the list if there is not consensus regarding his suitability. Problems can occur, however, when the list of acceptable consultants becomes so limited that no viable site visit schedule can be arranged, or when the list does not adequately represent some of the insights and backgrounds needed. There is a tendency on the part of the university faculties and administrators to recommend individuals who are known to them personally and, therefore, care must be taken to avoid selecting consultants who have strong ties to any one university. Sometimes, however, these ties do not surface until the site visit takes place.

The selection of consultants is central to the success of the review. It is necessary to find individuals who have outstanding credentials in the field, who can devote sufficient time to the project, who have sufficient background in both the discipline and in university governance to view the program from a broad perspective, and who can synthesize the assessments of all programs visited. The appointment of a lead consultant is necessary to ensure that one person is responsible for the team during the site visits, and that someone can speak for the team to the Board of Regents -- both in a written report and in an oral presentation.

The scope of the task assigned to the consultants cannot be minimized. Viewing numerous programs and keeping their characteristics in mind, synthesizing all of the information gathered, dealing with the tensions on some campuses, trying to put a plan together for a discipline in a state system, and ultimately bearing the burden for decisions affecting many people is an awesome and demanding responsibility.

Site Visits. The visits to the campuses for the reviews are similar to accreditation visits in the scheduling of individuals and groups to be seen, the data perused, and the problems encountered. Unlike an accreditation visit, however, the consultants are not working from a prescribed set of minimum criteria but must make qualitative decisions from their own sense of the discipline and a set of guideline questions provided by the Board of Regents office. The major categories in the set of questions include: program quality, program priority, career implications, program administration and management, and articulation with other programs.

When all of the site visits have been concluded, the consultants meet to agree on recommendations for each of the nine universities and for the State University System as a whole. These recommendations center primarily on program quality, duplication of programs, financial support, and the need for any additional programs or a shifting of programs in the discipline under review.

The final report is prepared by the lead consultant, and copies are distributed to the Board of Regents, the Chancellor, the universities, and other interested parties. The report becomes a public document and is available to anyone who requests a copy.

✓ The consultants recommendations are reviewed by the universities and the Board of Regents staff. After taking into consideration all responses to the report, the Vice Chancellor for Academic Programs presents a series of recommendations to the Board of Regents for action.

Actions Resulting from Program Review

The first programs to be selected for systemwide review by the Board of Regents, in 1976, were external degree programs, education, and engineering. The second group of reviews included nursing, foreign languages and linguistics, and oceanography in 1977; and the third group, which has been underway since 1978, consists of psychology, biological sciences, social work, and computer science.

The actions taken by the Board of Regents as a result of systemwide reviews include:

1. Program Approval. Requests for new degree programs in a discipline targeted for review are usually held until the completion of the consultants' assessment of the need for the program in the state, and the availability of resources within the university to offer a quality program. An endorsement by the review consultants considerably strengthens the case for program approval. If the consultants see a need for the program in the state, but consider the given university unsuitable for the delivery of that program, recommendations may be made for another arrangement such as a cooperative degree or a contract with a private institution.

2. Program Termination or Limitation. In Florida, there has been little necessity for the termination of doctoral programs, because the Board of Regents controlled growth at this level by exercising a moratorium on new programs from 1971 to 1976, and since then, universities have been cautious about launching new doctoral programs because of scarce resources. Most of the programmatic terminations recommended by systemwide review consultants have been limited to tracks or specializations within the graduate degree curricula. By eliminating weak areas in a department, faculty and financial resources have been freed to strengthen the remainder of the program.

   Through the systemwide reviews which have been completed, two baccalaureate degrees in nursing have been eliminated: one interinstitutional program and one at a given university. In the latter case, the negative view of the review consultants was taken into account along with a denial of accreditation by the

National League for Nursing and the conclusive decision by the university administrators. In addition, bachelor and master degree programs in engineering mechanics and materials science were eliminated at one university.

A form of control of the number and kinds of new programs has occurred through statewide reviews when the consultants recommend limitations in growth. For example, the engineering review report contained a recommendation that no new engineering programs be instituted for at least a five year period, and the teacher education review recommended that statewide undergraduate enrollment be limited to 90 percent of the 1975 level by 1978. Such recommendations have had the effect of assisting the Regents in their efforts to control unnecessary growth in programs.

3. Coordination and Cooperation. The systemwide reviews have served as an impetus to instituting cooperative arrangements between universities in the state system and with private colleges and universities. For example, a recommendation in the engineering program review report has brought about the development of the Southeast Florida Engineering Consortium comprised of two state universities and one private university.

   Cooperative programs leading to doctoral degrees have been instituted between state universities in such areas as education and oceanography. This has enabled the State University System to draw upon the strengths of two universities to offer services over a broader geographical area, to bring the resources of two universities to bear on one program, and to reduce the proliferation of separate degree programs.

   A further effort to deliver services without expanding programs has prompted the Regents, through enabling legislation, to seek contracts with private colleges and universities for the delivery of particular programs. The first contracts, in the fields of nursing and social work, are under development and legislative funding is being sought for their implementation.

   Other recommendations related to cooperation affect the instructional activities of a discipline within a university. For example, the foreign languages and linguistics review brought forward a recommendation for a comprehensive multilingual/multicultural center which would require cross-departmental cooperation at Florida International University. Other reviews have advised departments to become more active in cross-disciplinary involvements on their campuses in order to give students additional breadth in their programs.

4. Budgetary Considerations. Systemwide reviews have an impact on budget requests by identifying those areas which are underfunded in the discipline under review. In the oceanography, engineering,

biology, and psychology reviews, in particular, the consultants looked at equipment needs and directed the attention of both the university administration and the Board's budget office to the special equipment required by the departments under review. In most cases, this added weight to the departments' budget requests for new or replacement equipment.

Further budgetary matters that are discussed in most reviews include the level of faculty salaries, the number of instructional and support personnel available to a department, the aid provided to students in the form of assistantships and fellowships, and the general support given to the departments.

5. Statewide Planning. At approximately the same time that the Board of Regents began the systemwide academic program review process in Florida, the task of reviewing the role and scope of the universities was undertaken. This process is still underway. One of the goals of the role and scope study is to identify programs which might be developed in a complementary rather than a competitive way. In Florida, this is especially important as the six newer urban based universities and the three older traditionally residential institutions develop complementary missions.

As the role and scope activities began, there was little external information available on the relative strengths or potential of the academic programs in the younger universities. As the study has moved along, however, the independent information received as a result of the systemwide program reviews has added strength to certain conclusions reached regarding the missions and goals of the universities. In addition, as the first phase of the role and scope study was completed, a legislative budget request was under development which included requests for some major quality improvement funding for selected academic programs. The selection of those programs which will receive priority treatment (subject to budget approval by the Legislature), has been guided to a large extent by the outcomes of the role and scope study and the recommendations available through the program review reports. The role and scope study provides information about local and university resources which could complement a given program, and the systemwide program review process offers insight into the quality of the program. The selection of the program in marine science at the University of South Florida exemplifies this process: the role and scope study identified the Deep Water Port at the University's Bayboro Harbor as an important resource and the program review in oceanography showed that the university could assume added dimensions in this program.

Another State University System effort for increased funding identifies the need for a major allocation for additional equipment in certain programs. The program review process helps to verify that programs have special equipment needs and to identify the kinds of assistance required by a given program.

The program review process has an obvious role to play in presenting a base for statewide planning for a program area. In looking at the spread of educational opportunities available to students across the state, some determination can be made about gaps or overloads in the levels and types of professionals prepared in the system. This has a direct tie to the manpower needs of the state and helps the universities respond appropriately not only to the communities they serve but also to the state as a whole.

Planning efforts for a program can expand beyond the university system as a result of the reviews. In the nursing review, for example, the consultants recommended that a statewide study be done to look at the levels and types of nurses being prepared in the state. This recommendation was forwarded by the Board of Regents to the Commissioner of Education who, in turn, created a task force comprised of representatives of the vocational schools, community colleges, public and private universities, health care providers, the Board of Nursing, and professional organizations. That group opens an additional avenue for communication in the state and offers the possibility of building a constructive plan for the delivery of educational services in nursing.

Outcomes of the systemwide reviews are not limited to the actions which must be taken by the Board of Regents. The individual universities can use the results of the review as a base for administrative decisions, curriculum planning, and the allocation of resources. Simply engaging in the preparation for the review, the faculty and administration have an opportunity to focus their attention for a period of time on the condition of the program and engage in dialogue about mutual concerns. When the consultants' assessment of the program is added to this process, further opportunity is presented to communicate about priorities and future plans for strengthening the program.

The Value of Systemwide Review

Whether or not the systemwide review process is considered to be valuable depends very much upon the match between the outcomes of the review and the expectations held by the various participants involved. A multicampus system has many constituencies, and what may be considered a positive outcome by one may be the opposite to another. There is no doubt, however, that the review process brings to light the kinds of issues and problems that require the attention of both the local level faculties and administrators, and the state level boards and legislators. The fact that these issues are discussed by consultants external to the State University System lends a credibility to the enterprise which could not be achieved by an internal group. Maintaining that credibility is central to the process, and care must be taken to protect the consultants from any undue influence from any of the constituents involved.

At the implementation stage of the review, there are weaknesses inherent in the process which detract from the value of some of the consultants' recommendations as viewed by the faculties and the administrators. They often feel rather frustrated when the reports criticize the programs for deficiencies that cannot be rectified at the campus level. Recommendations for increases in faculty benefits and salaries, for the purchase of very costly equipment, for new facilities, or for support personnel require implementation beyond the universities and even beyond the Board of Regents. Matters such as faculty salaries and benefits are negotiable items between the faculty union and the Board of Regents with final control in the Legislature. The value of such recommendations, however, is in consistently reminding both the Board and the Legislature that improvements are needed on a large scale in order to address the general issue of building and maintaining quality programs in the State University System and illustrates the interrelationship between such programs and properly equipped laboratories, adequate instructional space, and a well qualified, highly motivated faculty.

Another problem exists when the review reports discuss weaknesses in the programs which may be caused by a cognate discipline which is outside the control of the department under review. This may serve to heighten tensions which already exist between the two departments and reinforce negative attitudes. The consultants have no choice but to raise these issues, however, and it requires a sensitive administrator to interpret the problem and achieve understandings in these delicate interdepartmental relationships.

At times, recommendations cannot be implemented because they require the cooperation of agencies and institutions beyond the control of the Board of Regents. For example, when the education programs were reviewed, a number of the recommendations required approval from other state agencies before they could be implemented. The state councils responsible for approving the kinds of changes sought did not endorse them.

Difficulties in implementing the review recommendations are to be expected to some extent, for the consultants have the responsibility to expose the weaknesses in the program and the system as they perceive them; individuals new to the state and limited by the short time spent on each campus cannot be expected, however, to offer solutions to all of the problems they encounter.

On the positive side, the value of the review process for academic planning, both on the individual campuses and at the state level, has been illustrated by the outcomes of the completed reviews. Where the consultants' recommendations and assessments have been most useful is in developing a sense of the strengths and weaknesses of a program area throughout the system. Faculties which are performing well have been recognized and reinforced, and those departments which are experiencing difficulties have been given some assistance in analyzing their situations. Building upon these assessments, plans

can be developed for strengthening the program area and addressing the larger systemwide issues which have an effect on the programs. Some of the impact is felt immediately by the universities, but the larger impact is more subtle as the intricate process of change in a multicampus system is initiated, developed, and brought to conclusion.

Footnotes

[1]University of Florida (Gainesville), Florida State University (Tallahassee), and Florida A&M University (Tallahassee).

[2]University of South Florida (Tampa), 1960; Florida Atlantic University (Boca Raton), 1964; University of West Florida (Pensacola), 1967; University of Central Florida (Orlando), 1968, formerly Florida Technological University; Florida International University (Miami), 1972; and the University of North Florida (Jacksonville), 1972.